

**IMPACT OF CULTURAL REFLECTIONS ON EVENT PARTICIPATION WITHIN
THE SCOPE OF DIGITAL PUBLIC RELATIONS:
CASE OF THE CHEETOS DIGITAL MUSEUM**

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ABSTRACT

Considering the technological characteristics of the current century, the concept of digital public relations has become essential for the organizations. Within this context, the interdisciplinary feature of the concept is very important in strategic communication management. It should be underlined that the activities carried out within the scope of digital public relations are a crucial part of the strategic communication management approach. At this point, it is important to examine the variables that have an impact on the behavior of individuals to prefer and participate in events. The existing literature indicates that one of the most significant of these variables is the concept of "culture". The main purpose of the study is to examine the impact of cultural reflections on the participation of individuals within the scope of digital public relations. The study aims to reveal the expectations of people who are interested in digital public relations events in terms of cultural reflections. A qualitative research method, namely focus group research was used in the study. The research sample consists of non-random, teleological sampling method. In this context, the participants are those who have information about the Digital Cheetos Museum Event. As a case study of focus group evaluation, the images of Digital Cheetos Museum Event, which was held in the USA in 2016 and in Turkey in 2018, were presented to the participants (See Figures 1, 2, 3, 4). Within the scope of this case, the questions were directed to the participants within the framework of the research questions of the study. The results of the study show that, within the scope of digital public relations, cultural reflections may have an impact on the participation of individuals in the event, since all the research questions were answered positively.

Keywords: Digital Public Relations, Event, Culture, Strategic Communication, Digital Museum

INTRODUCTION

Based on the existing literature, we can say that public relations is a discipline that enables institutions to establish strategic communication with their target audiences. In this context, communication management within the framework of public relations is expressed as the sum of the planning, implementation and evaluation activities of an organization's communication with its internal and external target groups and the groups that have an impact on reaching the goals of the organization (Grunig, 2005: 15). Balta Peltekoğlu, defines public relations as “a strategic communication management process, which is organized on the goals of the organization and carried out with target audiences such as consumers, distributors or employees, of which the order of importance varies according to the objectives of the organization and the campaign” (Balta Peltekoğlu, 2009: 7). In this context, it is possible to say that the events presented according to the organizational goals are a mean of public relations within the framework of the administrative function.

Getz defines the concept of event as a remarkable experience taking place at a specified time and place under certain conditions (Getz, 2007:19). Shone and Parry define the concept of event as “phenomenon other than the normal activities that people do in their daily lives which are cultural, celebratory, personal and organizational, and carried out in order to entertain people, to inform them and make them experience something” (Shone and Parry, 2004: 3). In the current literature, regardless of its type and content, the characteristics an event should have can be listed as follows (Getz, 1991: 45-46; Jago and Shaw, 1998, : 29 cited in Argan and Yüncü, 2015, :2).

- * Occurring for a limited time only,
- * Organized only once or rarely in a country or city,
- * Offering extraordinary experiences to visitors and participants,
- * Being public events and celebrations,
- * Aiming to celebrate or highlight a particular theme,
- * For most of the time, not having a fixed structure (building, facility, etc.) of their own,
- * Event programs consisting of separate and various activities,
- * Events should not be routine,
- * Events should be unique,
- * They should have a labor-intensive structure,
- * Be for-profit or non-profit

It can be said that the events, which are as old as the history of humanity, have become an important function that have an impact on the reputation and image of the organization within the framework of its vision and mission. In this context, it is possible to state that the event has a structural characteristic that is organized for many reasons such as raising awareness, creating an image and promoting, and requires capability and constant control in terms of the organizational process. From this point of view, it should be underlined that in order to create creative works in the context of making a difference, it is necessary to act by considering the smallest detail (Hoyle, 2002:6-8). At this point, the importance of the concept of event management emerges, especially in terms of the positive and meaningful effect that institutions will have on their target audiences. When we examine the current literature, we see that the concept of event management as a public relations tool is increasing its importance for many disciplines on a continuous basis (Bowdin, 2003: 5).

Whether it is organized for recreational, personal or cultural purposes, each event has its own characteristics. These characteristics help to distinguish event from one another and to administer them properly (Shone and Parry, 2004, :4). In terms of their purposes, types of events are categorized as social events, charitable events and corporate events (Wolf, P., Wolf, J. and Levine, D. 2005 cited in Balta Peltekoğlu, 2009: 325). Types of events can also be categorized based on their purposes: leisure time events, events carried out for cultural acquisition, events carried out for an organization and events carried out personally (Shone and Parry, 2005:4 cited in Balta Peltekoğlu, 2009: 325). We can also categorize the events based on their size: mega, regional, major, and local events (Allen, J., O'toole, et al. 2008 cited in Balta Peltekoğlu, 2009: 323). According to Getz, the events can also be categorized according to their content: cultural celebrations, art events, business and commercial events, sports events, educational and scientific events, recreational events, political events, and personal events (Getz, 2007: 22). The existing literature does not distinguish events in a category such as digital or online. However, in current digital world, this is specifically emphasized and this indicates that the concept of event management can be reconsidered and viewed from a different perspective and new elements can be introduced to it.

1. DIGITAL PUBLIC RELATIONS AND THE EVENT CONCEPT

According to Gifford, digital public relations can go beyond the methods of traditional public relations through the use of Internet in order to reach a wider target audience (Gifford, 2010: 62). The concept of public relations forms the core of innovative marketing thanks to the speed of digital technology. The Internet is a medium for collaboration and interaction among individuals and their computers with a worldwide broadcasting capability and dissemination of information regardless of the geographical location (Leiner et al., 2009: 22). Today, the rapid development of Internet technology helped to reconsider the strategic communication management in the last decade. In this process, the emergence of Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 made it essential for organizations to implement applications for the target audience. From the perspective of public relations, we see the fact that digital public relations applications are increasing on a daily basis and they offer a significant professional alternative.

Digital public relations bring new tools and accommodation into the field. We can say that faster results can be achieved in various fields such as image, reputation, crisis management and event management for target audiences. At this point, the dimension of public relations has been carried onto the digital platform and shown that events can be organized on digital media as well as opening the door to certain innovations. Many institutions have started organizing digital events along with real ones. Institutions establishing two way communication and eliminating the concept of distance by organizing quick, affordable, and practical events with target audiences is an important advantage of digital public relations.

1.2. The Importance of Cultural Reflection for Events concerning Digital Public Relations

Petrovici defines digital public relations as establishing strong and mutual relationships between an institution and various target audiences (Petrovici, 2014: 81). At this point, institutions should analyze cultural structure of their target audiences in order to establish strong relationships. Current literature shows that institutions have to shape themselves according to cultural features of the society in which they exist in order to be

successful. Culture, which involves the history, developmental features, methods of production, social relationships, all creative activities and value judgment created during these activities, and everything related to humans and their environment is learned, transferred, and operates as wholes with defined parts. Although culture is an extensive area of study, the common ground of all definitions is that culture is the whole of all learned behavior, shared by members of a society, meets human requirements, and is a complementary disposition.

According to Wilcox, et al. culture has a direct impact on communication (Wilcox, et al 2007: 162). Based on this, considering the fact that the concept of public relations is a strategic method of communication, it can be said that participating in events organized within the axis of digital public relations is an effective factor concerning reflecting cultural features of the society in which it exists. Each community has a cultural fabric and it is a fact that this reflects upon institutional culture and the way of doing business. However, this intercultural differentiation is a subject institutions, which have to do business with other cultures, has to study carefully. The same can be said for the event planning business. This issue must be taken into consideration if you are planning an event at a location where cultural differences are present and participants are a part of a different cultural fabric. In this context, it should be emphasized that any action should take cultural fabric of the target audience into consideration.

1.2.1. An Example of Cultural Reflection for Events concerning Digital Public Relations the Cheetos Museum Campaign

In 2016, the digital Cheetos museum campaign developed by Pepsico in 2016 was the first digital potato chips museum and exhibition event. Within the framework of the event, consumers were asked to take photos of chips that look similar to an image on the website and upload them to relevant website to be exhibited in the museum. At the same time, it was stated that the most successful among the uploads would win a monetary prize. The Cheetos brand had reached the highest sales record in the USA thanks to this campaign. 127,717 images were uploaded to the digital Cheetos museum within the framework of the event (<https://vimeo.com/222585456>. Online: 02.06.2021).

The Digital Cheetos Museum Event held in the USA was integrated into Turkey in 2018. Held between 01.04.2018 and 23.06.2018, the Cheetos Museum event included 20 unique chips photographs at the address <https://www.cheetosmuzesi.com>. Chips were comprised of random shapes with no standard structure. Participants can enter the competition by comparing any of the 20 shapes to animals, buildings, people, trees, or items and send a text describing their creative comparison along with their name, surname, age, e-mail, phone number, and address information to the address <https://www.cheetosmuzesi.com> (free of charge). One of the evaluation criteria for the competition jury was “the most creative imitation.” In addition, participants could upload their own chips photographs to the address <https://www.cheetosmuzesi.com> (free of charge) instead of using the current photographs. They were asked to preserve the chips on the photographs and submit them while being awarded a prize. The figures uploaded by participants were exhibited digitally in the cheetos museum (<https://www.bidolucekilis.com/cheetos-muzesi-300-000-tl-odullu-yarisma/amp/> Online: 10.07.2021).

1.2.1.2. An Example of Comparison towards Cultural Reflections for Events concerning Digital Public Relations the Cheetos Museum Campaign



Figure 1. The Entrance Image for the Digital Cheetos Museum Event Held in the USA
Source: www.cheetosmuseum.com Online: 04.12.2016



Figure 2. The Entrance Image for the Digital Cheetos Museum Event Held in Turkey
Source: <https://www.cheetosmuzesi.com> Online: 05.04.2018

The entrance image of the digital Cheetos museum event held in the USA (see Figure 1) has a dinosaur figure which has been identified with American geography on the background, whereas the entrance image of the digital Cheetos museum event held in Turkey (see Figure 2) has the symbol of the Trojan Horse which is one of the cultural symbols of Turkey on the background. In the American event, the Cheetos character was positioned with a hat that is popular over there, whereas in the Turkish event it was positioned with tea in a teacup unique to Turkish geography, a carpet with a traditional Turkish motif, and a traditional figure on top of a coffee table again with traditional features.



Figure 3. Collective Image from the Digital Cheetos Museum Event Held in the USA

Source: Source: www.cheetosmuseum.com Online: 04.12.2016

The collective image from the digital Cheetos museum event held in the USA (see Figure 3) was shaped according to cultural features of the American geography. Chips figures that look like Abraham Lincoln and the Statue of Liberty can be given as examples. The collective image from the digital Cheetos museum event held in Turkey (see Figure 4) was shaped according to cultural features of the Turkish geography. Chips figures that look like symbols identified with Turkey such as the Maiden's Tower, Fairy Chimneys, and the Trojan Horse can be given as examples.

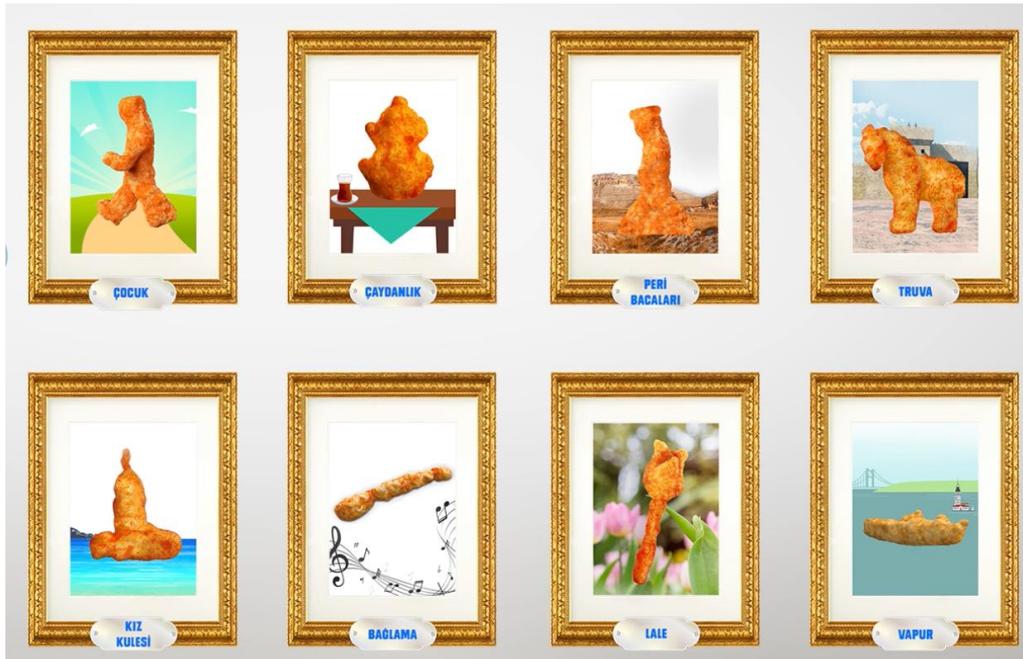


Figure 4. Collective Image from the Digital Cheetos Museum Event Held in Turkey
Source: <https://www.cheetosmuzesi.com> Online: 05.04.2018

2. THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The main aim of the study is to examine the effect of cultural reflections on participation of individuals in events within the scope of digital public relations. The study aims to set forth expectation from individuals interested in activities in terms of cultural reflections within the scope of digital public relations.

2.1. Research Questions

The First Research Question: Is having cultural-artistic works or tools specific to the geography (baglama, carpets etc.) at the event within the scope of digital public relations an effective element in terms of participation in the event?

The Second Research Question: Is the presence of cultural habits of the geography (tea etc.) in images of events within the scope of digital public relations an effective element in terms of participation in the event?

The Third Research Question: Is the presence of culturally important locations of the geography (the Maiden's Tower etc.) in images of events within the scope of digital public relations an effective element in terms of participation in the event?

The Fourth Research Question: Is the presence of elements culturally specific to the country in terms of culture of the geography (tulips, the Trojan Horse etc.) in images of events within the scope of digital public relations an effective element in terms of participation in the event?

3. STUDY SAMPLE AND METHOD

A focus group study was conducted within the scope of the study. “The focus group study technique has structural features carried out in systematic environments with a form that is based on recording for session which may last for 1 to 3 hours and during which subjects previously defined within the framework of a certain subject are discussed by participants under supervision of a moderator” (Steward and Shamdasani 2007, cited by Tozlu Öztay 2021: 54). “The number of participants for focus group sessions must be 12 at maximum and 6 at minimum in order for the participants to have the time and opportunity to express their opinions comfortably” (Shao 1999, :152, cited by Tozlu Öztay 2021: 54). For this reason, data regarding participants’ expectations with regards to cultural reflections within the scope of digital public relations were obtained after one hour sessions on the Internet with a total of 6 participants.

The study sample was comprised on participants selected by using non-random purposive sampling. “Non-random purposive sampling involves non-random individuals selected for a purpose in research frequently used in qualitative studies conducted by a small sample size” (Strauss and Corbin, 2014, cited by Tozlu Öztay 2021: 54). In this context, participants were comprised of individuals knowledgeable with the Digital Cheetos Museum event. The participants were informed that the data obtained would not be used for any purpose other than the treatise and their personal information would not be shared. Images from the Digital Cheetos Museum Event images held in the USA in 2016 and Turkey in 2018 were shared with the participants as focus group evaluation sample (see Figures 1, 2, 3, 4). The questions were asked to the participants within the framework of study questions of the study within the scope of said sample.

4. FOCUS GRUP STUDY DATA

At the beginning of the Focus Group study, the participants were shown the images in figure 1 and figure 2 and were asked whether they have heard of said event. All of the participants said that they have not seen the first image but have seen the second image. Two of the participants stated that they had purchased Cheetos to find a shape, one of the participants stated that they had found a shape but did not upload it due to their busy schedule. Other two participants stated that they were impressed with the campaign and followed it.

***Cultural-artistic works or tools specific to the geography (baglama, carpets etc.) at the event within the scope of digital public relations as an effective element in terms of participation in the event.**

The participants were asked whether the “baglama” used in within the scope of the first event or the “saxophone” used within the scope of the second event were more eye catching for them and whether this was effective for the participants when participating in or thinking about participating in said digital events of the Cheetos brand.

*All of the participants have stated that the baglama was more eye catching.

Participant 3: Stated that baglama gave a warm message in terms of participating in the event. He stated that he knew saxophone as a musical instrument but would not prefer to listen to it.

Participant 4: Stated his opinions saying “having an image of a musical instrument that belongs to us at an event of a global brand is important for me, I do not consume this brand’s products but the work is beautiful nevertheless.”

Based on their responses, the participants were asked how eye catching it was to have the Cheetos character on a carpet with Turkish motifs and whether this was effective in terms of their participation.

*All of the participants have stated that the carpet with Turkish motifs was quite eye catching.

Participant 2: Stated expressed The brand could use what they did in the USA in the event in Turkey but they did not. This pleased me the first time I saw the campaign images.”

Participant 4: Agreed with Participant 2.

Participant 1: Stated that, found having the Cheetos character welcoming participants on a Turkish carpet as funny and sympathetic.

The presence of cultural habits of the geography (tea etc.) in images of events within the scope of digital public relations as an effective element in terms of participation in the event.

The participants were asked how attractive it was to have the Cheetos character with tea which is a traditional Turkish habit and whether this was effective in terms of their participation.

*All of the participants stated that having the Cheetos character holding tea was quite eye catching.

Participant 3: Stated “As a tea aficionado, I really enjoyed having it placed like this. I am sure that many people in Turkey found this quite interesting.”

Participants 4, 1, and 2: They agreed with Participant 3.

Participant 6: Stated his opinions saying “I thought that the event was for children only, a friend of mine recognized it and I recognized that it is for grown-ups once I saw the Cheetos character with tea in its hand. Then I got curious and found out that many grown-ups in the USA are trying to find some shapes.”

Participant 5: Agreed with Participant 6 and Participant 5 did not see anything specific to Turkish culture in the event’s advertisement and saw the web image by chance and the campaign was lacking in the advertising aspect.

Participants 3, 4, 1, 2, and 6: They said they agreed with Participant 5.

***The presence of culturally important locations of the geography (the Maiden’s Tower etc.) in images of events within the scope of digital public relations as an effective element in terms of participation in the event.**

The participants were asked how attractive it was for them to have locations within the culture that were important in terms of culture (the Maiden’s Tower, Fairy Chimneys etc.) in the images of the Cheetos Digital Museum event and whether it was effective in terms of their participation.

*All of the participants stated that it was very attractive for them to have locations within the culture that were important in terms of culture (the Maiden’s Tower, Fairy Chimneys etc.) in the images of the Cheetos Digital Museum event.

Participant 2: Stated that “A global brand caring for valuable monuments of a country shows how much it cherishes people in that country. So I think it was a genuine behavior.”

Participant 1: Stated that “I think having such images in events will contribute to tourism in that nation so I found it to be valuable.”

Participant 3: Stated that “This is not random, the brand has obviously placed them in this way strategically. And it was the right thing to do, I think it is valuable that Cheetos cares for our culture even though their advertisements usually target children.”

Participant 4: Stated that “Brands used to impose their own culture, now they are using our own culture and I think this is the most important aspect. Having elements of our own culture in such events show how valuable we are in international platforms.”

Participant 5: Said he agreed with Participant 4.

Participant 6: Stated that that “Of course, touristic locations such as the Maiden’s Tower and Fairy Chimneys are very valuable but I think it would attract more attention if they had used important locations such as Topkapi Palace or our Historical Mosques as well.”

***The presence of elements culturally specific to the country in terms of culture of the geography (tulips, the Trojan Horse etc.) in images of events within the scope of digital public relations as an effective element in terms of participation in events.**

The participants were asked how eye catching it was to have elements culturally specific to the country in terms of culture of the geography (tulips, the Trojan Horse etc.) in images of events within the scope of digital public relations and whether this was effective in terms of their participation

*All participants stated that they found the presence of elements culturally specific to the country in terms of culture of the geography (tulips, the Trojan Horse etc.) in images of events to be very impressive.

Participant 4: Stated that “The Trojan Horse got my attention the first time I saw the home page of the website and I thought that they put a shape of a horse and I likened it to the Trojan Horse. Then I got curious about the campaign and started browsing other pages of the website.”

Participant 6: Stated that “Seeing tulips, a traditional Turkish symbol since the Ottoman times, caught my attention. I think they could use more figures like that one.”

Participant 5: Stated that “The campaign advertisement in Turkey was rather focused on children and that’s why it wasn’t as effective as it was in the USA, I believe that many cultural shapes could be found and exhibited if it was more widespread.”

**After hearing their responses, the participants were asked how impressive the Dinosaur figure in Figure 1 was.*

Participant 5: Stated that “Dinosaurs are too fictional for me. I don’t think it would be as effective as the Trojan Horse.”

Participant 1: Stated that he agreed with Participant 1 and stated that “I think it is integrated with the movie Jurassic Park with the USA. I would like it but I liked the Trojan Horse more.”

All other participants stated that they agreed with participants 1 and 5.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

It is probable to see various opinions on current literature with regards to the concept of digital public relations. However, the common theme of the opinions shows the importance of the culture factor in events organized within the scope of digital public relations. In this

context, it can be said that placing cultural elements in events have a positive impact on individuals' view on events and nurture feelings at individual context. This shows how effective cultural variables are in terms of event choices and participating behavior of individuals.

The results of the study show that having cultural elements in events organized within the scope of digital public relations is effective in terms of strategic communication management. In this context, it is probable to remark that digital public relations has become an important administrative function. The main goal of the study is to examine the effect of cultural reflections on participation of individuals in events within the scope of digital public relations. The results obtained in accordance with study questions of the focus group study conducted accordingly are as below;

The First Research Question: Is having cultural-artistic works or tools specific to the geography (baglama, carpets etc.) at the event within the scope of digital public relations an effective element in terms of participation in the event?

Conclusion: Results obtained during the study show that having cultural-artistic works or tools specific to the geography (baglama, carpets etc.) at the event within the scope of digital public relations is an effective element in terms of participation in the event. Some participants defined this impact as a "warm message" while others defined it as "funny and sympathetic." Based on this, it can be said that the first study question was obtained as positive.

The Second Research Question: Is presence of cultural habits of the geography (tea etc.) in images of events within the scope of digital public relations an effective element in terms of participation in the event?

Conclusion: Results obtained during the study show that presence of cultural habits of the geography (tea etc.) in images of events within the scope of digital public relations is an effective element in terms of participation in The event. Based on this, it can be said that the first study question was obtained as positive.

The Third Research Question: Is the presence of culturally important locations of the geography (the Maiden's Tower etc.) in images of events within the scope of digital public relations an effective element in terms of participation in the event?

Conclusion: Results obtained during the study show that presence of culturally important locations of the geography (the Maiden's Tower etc.) in images of events within the scope of digital public relations is an effective element in terms of participation in the event. Some participants defined this impact as "a brand caring about valuable monuments of a nation shows the value it places on that country's people" while others defined it as "I think it will contribute to the national tourism." Based on this, it can be said that the first study question was obtained as positive.

The Fourth Research Question: Is the presence of elements culturally specific to the country in terms of culture of the geography (tulips, the Trojan Horse etc.) in images of events within the scope of digital public relations an effective element in terms of participation in the event?

Conclusion: Results of the study show that the presence of elements culturally specific to the country in terms of culture of the geography (tulips, the Trojan Horse etc.) in images of events within the scope of digital public relations is an effective element in terms of participation in the event. Some participants defined this impact as "The Trojan Horse got my attention" while others defined it as "Seeing tulips, a traditional Turkish symbol since the

Ottoman times, caught my attention.” Based on this, it can be said that the first study question was obtained as positive.

Having all research questions of the study as positive shows that cultural reflections within the scope of digital public relations may have an impact in individuals' participating in events. It can be said that the findings of the study completed by using the Focus group method within the scope of the study may open the doors for quantitative researchers and it can be suggested that new academic studies in this regard can be conducted in said field.

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